

PRESS RELEASE

Two Days International Seminar on “Reliable Flood Forecasting” A Challenge for Data, Models or Forecaster skills

Islamabad, 18 December, 2013: United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in close cooperation with the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has launched two days International seminar on Reliable Flood Forecasting at the Avari hotel in Lahore.

Representatives and officials from UNESCO, PMD, Government of Japan and JICA, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHARM), Pakistan Council for Water Resources Research (PCRWR), Indonesian Meteorological and Geophysics Agency (BMKG), United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), Federal Flood Commission (FFC) and Irrigation Departments have participated in the seminar.

The seminar aims at bringing together the scientists, hydrological modelers, meteorologists, planners and decision makers to develop mechanism to meet the challenges for data, model and forecasting skills for improvement of flood forecasting and early warning system in Pakistan in order to save the population affected by flood.

Speaking at the inaugural session, chief guest Maj. Gen. Muhammad Saeed Aleem, Chairman NDMA said that flood had been the major problem in Pakistan from disaster perspective and that the country had witnessed significant floods consecutively in the last four years which needed an urgent attention and focus to upgrade the flood forecasting and early warning system timely and accurately.

He said that some improvement in the forecasting capability of Pakistan had witnessed which was evident from the recent monsoon season that despite the high flooding situation in a few eastern rivers, minimum losses were recorded as compare to previous years. He urged Professor Dr. Shahbaz Khan from UNESCO and other participants to conduct a technical session on the issues of flash floods and urban flooding.

UNESCO in collaboration with various stakeholders initiated a major project for upgrading the flood forecasting and early warning systems and for risk mapping of floodplains along the Indus River. This project includes major upgrades to the forecasting software using the remote sensing technologies, especially in connection to flood management decision making at a hierarchy of levels and its inter-relationship to flood hazard assessment and planning.

In his welcome remarks, Arif Mehmood, Director General PMD said that Pakistan remained prone to hydro-meteorological disasters like storms, drought, earthquake, and cyclones that put a bad impact on the country's economy. He extended his gratitude to UNESCO, JICA and Government of Japan for the implementation of strategic strengthening of flood warning

and management capacity of Pakistan project at the time when Pakistan required major upgrade to the flood early warning capacity.

The government of Japan is assisting in the induction of latest technologies and trainings at the flood forecasting system in Pakistan to overcome the natural calamities in the country, mostly happening due to flood.

Takao Akutsu, Manager at Disaster Management Support System Office at JAXA said that this project had been a good example of international cooperation and mentioned that JAXA was working on space programme for the last fifty years in moving forward and to step forward for cooperation with other agencies for disaster risk management solutions.

The Reliable Flood Forecasting seminar is a series of UNESCO's initiative which will draw upon international and national experience for improving the accuracy and reliability of flood forecasting models, specially using the new modelling systems. As such four training workshops have been delivered so far, which were hosted by NUST, PMD and SUPARCO and Pakistan Water Partnership (PWP) respectively.

Dr. Shahbaz Khan, Project Leader and Deputy Director of UNESCO Regional Science Bureau for Asia and the Pacific in his opening remarks emphasized that a great progress had been made in making reliable forecasts by PMD in the Indus River Basin through ICHARM, SUPARCO and JAXA. He said that there were many challenges in modelling Indus catchment because of its highly variable topography as well as Transboundary Rivers i.e. Indus and Kabul which lacked timely ground data. This made the use of satellite based data and modelling very critical for flood early warning and management, using the new modelling system developed under the project. This system needed to be extended to Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi and Sutlej rivers.

During the two days seminar, the participants will focus on key challenges to flood forecasting and early warning system, data challenges, modelling challenges and forecaster skills.

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For further information please contact;
Riaz Karim Khan, Press Officer
UNESCO-Islamabad
Cell: 0345-5858 956
Email: r.khan@unesco.org